

Linda Clair
Five-day Meditation Retreat
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Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 5d – Wednesday afternoon discussion session

Linda: Any questions?

Question: I was quite curious about one thing. In your own practice, when you felt like you were getting closer and closer to that enlightenment point, did you notice that there was less and less thinking? Or was it really not that linear?

Linda: No, it wasn't linear like that at all, and I didn't really know. I became more and more desperate, and then I went to Japan, and something happened there but I didn't even know. So you could say it happened there but I just didn't realise what had happened. And then after that, when I got back to Australia, I noticed that desperation wasn't there, but I didn't feel like I'd realised anything. So it was a new state but I didn't know what it was, and I didn't call it realisation or enlightenment anything because I don't think I had ingested it.

So from then that desperation wasn't there and I was just sitting. And that intention, that deep intention had gone, the longing had gone, but I was still sitting. So I think there probably, at that point, were fewer thoughts, there wasn't as much thinking. Before that it might have decreased a bit but I probably was so involved in the whole thing that I didn't notice as much. The clearer you become, you start seeing everything that's there, and it feels like there's just as much. And there's not, it's just that you can't stand what's there and it becomes more and more intolerable.

Question: So even after you came back from Japan there were still some thoughts there?

Linda: Yes, and even after realisation there were still thoughts too. It's not like it all wipes out straight away. It was nothing like it was, and relatively you could say there was almost no thinking. But there's still this residual winding down, so you have to really be aware of that. I remember one time I went into a shop, after realisation, and I knocked something and broke it. And I was so horrified by it, and suddenly I felt incredibly blaah. It really reminded me – I suddenly felt like I was in hell, and it was only for thirty seconds maybe or a minute – and that reminded me how it used to be. And it showed me that it wasn't like that anymore – but it was just this sudden reminder.

But no, it didn't happen like that. And there were still a few periods where things would happen, it would come up, and even now occasionally there is something. But it's nothing like it was, so it's not to that degree, that horrified self-consciousness. It's not like that, it's just the shadow of what was there and *residual* stuff going through. And I often say, as long as you're in the body there's still something there. And that makes it actually more exciting – rather than nothing, nothing all the time, there's always a little bit, and that takes you more deeply into it.

But no, I didn't notice there were fewer thoughts and I was becoming calmer and calmer – it didn't feel like that at all. So you just can't gauge really where you are. I just know when I was desperate. And that's why I went to Japan – because I was desperate. And I was really scared about going, and it was pretty full on and horrible at times, but I would have done anything. I just needed that extra shock to do that. Not that everyone needs that but I just did it that time. When I got back it took about nine months before I had this retreat where I realised, "Ahh, this is it." But I think it actually happened there, and I was in shock and I didn't know what was going on, and then I realised. It was like I caught up with it and realised, and everything just clicked then. But the beginning of the end, if you can call it an end, started I'm pretty sure in Japan.

Question: So it was quite a long process then?

Linda: That last bit, yes, and before that it was seven years, eight years? I can't even remember and it doesn't matter now. Once you're here you really don't care how long it's taken, even if it took thirty years it wouldn't matter. And in a way it takes your whole life because everything you do in your life is part of this.

How are you M.?

Question: Just working away I suppose. So much of what other people have said has been just spot-on. As soon as I got here something changed or switched, and I feel being in your presence something's happening. All the sludge that comes up and all the horrors that I'm carrying in my body have been coming up, but I feel like I've been more able to use them. I think you had a conversation with A. about having those persistent thoughts or emotions and just working with it. And I feel like I've been able to do that more than I ever have been able to. And stuff has been coming up that probably would have consumed an entire seven-day retreat in the past, and I can sort of be with it and deal with it and it hasn't been taking hold. And then the next day there's another thing.

Linda: You'll never run out of things. 😊

Question: It was interesting to see there was one day a few days ago where I could see I had my current favourite thought – the thing that was really taking hold, the thing that I felt I needed to think about to resolve or get some clarity – and suddenly saw that it was just one of many favourite thoughts that I've had in the past throughout the practice that I don't even remember anymore. But at the time they seemed like the most important thing in the world. And whatever my current favourite thought was is equally irrelevant, and once this one passes something that I don't even anticipate is going to replace it. So that was helpful.

Linda: Good.

How are you going L.?

Question: Going pretty well. My question is about staying neutral. You've said in the past to try to remain as neutral as possible to whatever experience is arising. When we're sitting with pain or uncomfortable emotions and we're remaining neutral, what exactly is happening? What am I doing when I'm remaining neutral? And a second part of that question is: in your experience when you have extreme pain, like the time in Spain you had some extreme pain, what is it like in your

experience when you have that type of pain? Because I'm realizing more and more that I'm not supposed to push it away, it's supposed to remain wherever it is. What's it like for you?

Linda: Pain hurts, so I don't enjoy it, but it's not that you need to suffer. I can't say that I never suffer from it. That time in Spain it *was* extreme, so extreme I was sweating, I just wanted to go to hospital. And then someone fixed it and it was fine. It was a hernia – I'd never had one before and I didn't know what it was. (It was from stupid yoga. 😊) There was a doctor there and she just touched it and it went back in and that was it and I was fine. There wasn't this residual emotion about it. What happens is that pain still hurts but it doesn't usually hurt as much, as far as I can see. After that operation I had last year, after a couple of days I didn't take any more painkillers – I didn't want to, I just didn't feel pain. And they kept trying to shove them on me. So what I feel has happened – and you can't really gauge it – is that pain threshold has risen. So I just don't feel as much pain because there's not that really intense emotional content in it. And then when it goes, it's gone and I forget about it. Whereas before there'd be this lingering emotion and fear about it. Pain is not an emotion but suffering is. So they're two different things. Pain – you're always going to get pain, at times, while you're in the body. And it can wear you down and make you feel tired and a bit cranky and stuff, but it's nothing like it was before – that fear and that emotional thing. So it doesn't mean there's *no* emotional reaction to it but it's very minimal, and once it's gone it's gone, and you just go on to the next thing.

Question: So I'm wearing down the reaction to the pain when I'm sitting with pain and remaining neutral?

Linda: Yes, that's what you're doing. And the pain is just that which you're feeling while you're sitting, whatever it is. But sitting with it is doing quite a few things. It's forcing you to be present, and you're also doing it willingly, so you're willingly sitting with this – sometimes – quite severe pain. Some people looking at it would just say it's crazy, and the mind says it's crazy. But what you're really doing is wearing down your fear, you're facing your fear, because a large component of that pain is fear – the pain sitting.

During that retreat where I did realise, I was having some pain and during one sit it just suddenly left, it all went. I was still sitting and suddenly it just all dissolved and it was never there to that degree again, that was it, it was gone. And there was the realisation that it was never really there – it was just my reaction to it that produced it. You produce your own suffering, nothing else does, you're responsible for it. Your reactions to thoughts, to pain, perpetuate it so you are the cause of your own suffering. It's not anyone else, it's not your mind, you are. And that's what you're doing – you are taking responsibility and feeling and facing the pain that you've been avoiding for most of your life. And that's what this is all about.

So that's what it's doing. And when I'd have sittings where there was severe pain during my practice, I'd notice afterwards I'd feel incredibly clear. Sometimes a bit shocked but incredibly clear. And I started to realise and feel what it was doing. It was really clearing me out, burning everything out, burning out that past, forcing it out in a way – sitting with that pain. And it wasn't like I enjoyed it; I didn't even fully take responsibility. I couldn't be neutral at times; all I was doing a lot of the time was just waiting for the bell to go. Sometimes it would disappear for a little while and then it would come back, or it would change. But really at times it was just this very dense block of pain, so sitting through it is the way to go.

Manipulating it – there's no point, you just sit with it. There's no easy way, there are no shortcuts. It needs to be there for as long as it needs to be there and that's what you've got to accept, and you have to be prepared to put up with it for as long as it takes. Not say, "I'm going to do this for another two months," or, "I want to be enlightened in a year." You just have to be in there for the long haul to really go the whole way. You have to prove that, "I'll put up with anything to be free." And that's what happens. One of my teachers said, "You have to earn this," and it's sort of true. And you keep getting tested, "How much do you want this?" And you go, "Yeah, I really want it," and then something happens and you go, "Oh no," and then you get used to that and open up. So you never enjoy the pain and you can never really be completely neutral with it – because when you are it goes – but as much as possible. It's just as hard being neutral with pleasure as well.

Question: Is there a correlation then between being neutral and the pain disappearing? Because sometimes the pain does go.

Linda: Yes. So you can have periods where it does disappear, but that takes so much energy. Even though it might feel effortless and amazing, that is taking so much energy that you can't sustain it for long periods. So what you're doing is building up your speed and your ability to cope with that intensity and absorb that intensity. Have you been getting a lot of pain?

Question: Yes, but just sitting with it and remaining as neutral as I feel I can be. And then there are periods where it goes. But it's for quite short periods at a time.

Linda: That's okay. When it goes be as neutral with that too as you can. Often bliss is just a reaction to the absence of pain – you're in a lot a pain and then it goes and you feel blissful. So if you start to grab onto that bliss because you're scared of the pain coming back, then it'll just go. But if you can step back from that a bit, or not go towards it, just be with it and not be scared to let go of it, then you'll go more deeply in. So you do the opposite to what you think is normal and natural and what we've been taught. Because we get taught, "If you want something you go for it, you attach to it, you hold on to it, and you never let it go," whereas this is the opposite. So it's all about facing your fear. And if you do feel some sort of bliss the normal thing is to grab hold of it and say, "I want it to stay. I don't want to feel pain anymore." So facing your fear is stepping back from that bliss saying, "Well, if the pain needs to come, the pain needs to come," and not grabbing on to it.

Retreats where I had quite severe pain I could feel stuff falling away, just big chunks of ego falling away. And I'd started to crave it because I could feel this incredible intensity. I just craved that intensity and nothing else that I did, or did in the world or anything, measured up to that intensity. You just felt so intensely alive, and that's what you crave. You just want to feel intensely alive whatever that means and you never want to go to sleep again, and you're not satisfied with this half-life of imagining things and thinking and the normal stuff that you used to do. So what you're doing is very good, it's great, so keep doing that. And just sitting through it is enough, whatever. Do what you can but sitting through it is often just enough.

Question: Did you say the other day that all thoughts begin with a feeling, and if you did, could you elaborate on that?

Linda: Someone else said that I said that, but I don't know that I did say that.

Question: (Somebody else) You said every thought begins as a sensation.

Linda: Oh, did I? 😊

Question: Well, that explains why when I sit there going, “What feeling started this?” I can’t find one.

Linda: Well, fear, the emotion fear.

Question: This time last week I was in total panic mode with a very irregular heart beat and sitting at my computer going to send a message saying I wasn’t coming (to retreat). I sat with it, these repeated ectopic heartbeats, going, “This isn’t normal for me.” And so I just sat with that for a while and I didn’t tell R. because she would have gone, “You’re not going.” So I sat with it, and in the morning my pulse was as steady as it ever is, and has been since. And I was thinking then, “What was the connection between the panic state I was in and the irregular heart beat and all of the thoughts associated with it?” Anyway, I’m glad it steadied down and I’m glad I came – even though I was going to pack my bags on Saturday (to leave).

Linda: A lot of people feel it before a retreat, however long they’ve been doing retreats, they often feel that deep resistance and fear coming in to a retreat. And I know I joke about the cancellation policy but it’s serious – it is a way of really giving you that extra impetus to come, and it locks you in as well. It is a thing that helps people to go, “I’ve paid for it, I’m going to do it.” And very few people don’t turn up now and it’s great because it doesn’t give you so much of an option.

Question: I also felt that if I did run away it would be even more difficult to look at myself in the mirror from here on.

Linda: You’re here because you’re earnest about this. There are a lot of things you could be doing that a lot more pleasant than this. Although this is good isn’t it? 😊 It’s great. Nothing else you’d rather be doing.

Question: I never get it before I come but as soon as I get here, that happens to me – the second sitting this time. And I’ve had it once before, even though you’re sitting it feels like there’s a part of you separating to leave – it’s like there’re two.

Linda: Most people get it at some time – they just want to go, don’t want to stay here.

Question: I know over the years that a lot of what you’ve said I’ve had to wait and then I get it, especially around pain – that they were sensations. But I don’t get that thing that the body is just a thought. I leave it alone and then it will just come up, “How is the body a thought?”

Linda: Don’t worry about it.

Question: No, but I sort of can’t leave alone.

Linda: Well, if you keep going eventually you’ll realise what I mean, so keep going.

Question: I was going to start with that. I’ve been reading Nisargadatta’s *I Am That* as well, and that’s sort of blowing my mind a fair bit. This idea that the body’s a thought, but that every

experience is a thought, right? So our whole lives are just one big thought or multiple thoughts. He talks in that book about how universes are created and destroyed every day when people are born and die. And really powerfully about how the whole universe is created by us, for us, in a sense.

Linda: Yes, in a sense.

Question: But not “us” in the me I think I am, I guess. We’re all part of the same fundamental reality. It just seems so amazing to try and conceptualize: the whole universe I can perceive and conceive is just created by me, and that’s happening to everyone simultaneously. And somehow we’re living in our own creations that are rubbing up against each other or something. I just wondered how you saw things?

Linda: Well, no one is really connecting with each other because we’re all in our own little universe, this little bubble that we think is reality, and it’s really just all about us. It’s contained by fear. We’re scared of intimacy, we’re scared to reveal ourselves, we’re scared to be real. We want to be loved but we won’t allow ourselves to be loved. We’re so busy judging ourselves and everyone else there’s just no hope. So that’s how the world runs. And what happens of course is that you realise – there’s no fear.

People keep asking what’s this leading towards, and all it’s leading towards is love. This state of love where there’s no judgment, no fear – when I say *no* it’s not a hundred percent, it’s ninety-nine point nine, but in a way none – no fear, no judgment. There’s just this incredible connection with everything and everyone; this oneness that people talk about – it’s true. There’s no separation, there’s not this self-identification anymore. But you still function in the world, I’m still me, I do stuff. I think it’s why a lot of people who are realised keep a bit of distance, because if you have too much to do with them you start to judge them by how *you* think they’re behaving. And you get used to that energy thing and you see them behaving certain ways and then doubt starts to creep in, because you start to judge them. But you still do seemingly normal things, but there’s no intention behind them. There’s almost no intention behind anything. Stuff just happens. Often I don’t know why I’m doing things, I just do them.

Question: I guess in that case you can see people much more closely – how they really are, instead of your creation and overlay that we’re constantly putting on to everything.

Linda: It can be so, so beautiful. Being in a room like this, watching everyone being at the retreat, watching everyone going about their business. Everything is a symphony. Well, that’s how I see it and that’s how it works. That’s how I feel now – I’m just part of this huge symphony.

Question: Nisargadatta put it beautifully in one passage where he said, “We have two bodies – one is this physical body and the second body is everything in the universe, and we’re inhabiting them both simultaneously.”

Linda: It’s true, and that’s the deeper realisation. So you have the initial realisation, and I often talk about that deeper realisation where you have to learn to live in this physical body in this absolute state. But to stay in the world and to be of use to people you have to be able to function and merge the two together, merge the absolute and the relative so it’s seamless and there’s not this jolting. People say, “I’ve got to come into the world.” That doesn’t happen, it all becomes one. Everything contains the relative but the relative does not contain the absolute. But it’s something you need to

merge into to be able to be balanced and to deepen the whole thing, the realisation, to mature. It's part of the maturity of enlightenment. In enlightenment you start again, but you mature into it and that's a big part of it – not separating. I think some people still probably do that to a degree, and I did it, and you can't help but do it for a while – the relative and the absolute – whereas they are the same. Everything is the same, you don't go in and out of anything.

Question: So it took some years you would say before those two merged for you?

Linda: Yes, I can't remember how many years it took. Maybe five years, six years?

Question: And it's just a gradual thing that happens, or are there sudden step-changes in a similar way to...?

Linda: There are a whole lot of realisations after that initial one. There are a whole lot of deeper realisations and they're leading on to this. You're suddenly in this incredible universe – the universe is at your disposal. It's incredible, there are no limits, anything is possible. It's not like you're limited by your fear anymore, so anything is possible. You're not constrained by these rules that you've created for yourself, morals and all that stuff, which doesn't mean you go crazy. It's just this incredible sense of freedom. But you can get a bit obsessed with it. When you've been constrained for most of your life you get into this and it's very hard to contain it. In a way it becomes overwhelming. And you can get a bit obsessed with it and sort of want to just go off and live your life and feel that.

But then things start to come into balance, and especially if you're doing something like this. And maybe the way I did it helped, because I did start teaching reasonably early. Some people say you shouldn't do that, but I did, and I think the way I did it actually helped me. Because I still had to be concerned with practical things: cooking, money, advertising, all those things. And that just keep me tethered and grounded as well. It just gradually led to this deeper state. So in a lot of ways I think it's a state you have to grow into. And particularly if you get too many people around you too soon I think it probably can activate a part of your ego that isn't fully pure and affect that. I think it probably does that in a lot of people and I felt it at times in me – not that I had huge numbers but I could still feel it at times. You have to be really careful and admit it's there and let it go.

So there's a lot involved in teaching that you can use to take you more deeply into it. Or it can take you the other way really. It can be an incredible thing but there is so much more involved than how it appears. I saw my teacher and thought, "Oh, that would be a really nice position to be in. They're teaching, and stuff is done for them," and all that, but no. You don't really care if people love you anymore. You think that would be great having everyone love you but it doesn't do anything, it doesn't matter. You're not seeking that approval or love anymore, which is great, it's really, really good.

Question: It was interesting what you said yesterday that it was almost like you saw the only point of getting enlightened isn't for yourself anymore because your self is sort of gone. But it's then to start helping others to go on this journey.

Linda: That becomes, well for me, it's become more and more – until you do realise that's why you're here.

Question: I guess there's nothing better to do with your time here.

Linda: What else am I going to do? I can do stuff and it's nice, but really. But one of the main things, I feel, is that incredible connection with people, with other human beings. Nature is beautiful and all that but it's really the connection and the intimacy that you can feel with another human being. Often just passing someone on the street who you've never met before, and suddenly feel this incredible connection and intimacy. And then people who are doing this *with* you – it's even stronger – it's just this incredible bond. So for me that's one of the most beautiful things about it.

Question: Yes, this is a form of intimacy you can't really get any other way. Both between us and you and even between all of us.

Linda: Like I love my family, I love my kids and grandkids and stuff, but I don't have the same connection as I do with people here, or wherever I go. And that connection can get created really quite quickly too. Depending on how open people are. It's a really amazing thing. It's not why I do it but – what did Peter say? – “Love makes existence bearable,” and it was very true.